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Peter Bull\* and Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenberg

# **Equivocation and doublespeak in far right-wing discourse: an analysis of Nick Griffin's performance on BBC's *Question Time***

**Abstract:** An analysis was conducted of the discourse of Nick Griffin (leader of the BNP, the far right-wing British National Party), as featured on a television debate, broadcast on the popular BBC current affairs program *Question Time* (22 October 2009). On the basis of equivocation theory (Bavelas et al. 1990), it was hypothesized that Griffin's discourse may be seen to reflect an underlying communicative conflict. On the one hand, to be seen as racist is widely regarded as reprehensible in contemporary British society; on the other hand, much of the BNP's political support comes from its anti-immigrant stance. In this context, it was proposed that while Griffin denies criticisms that characterize the BNP as anti-immigrant or racist, he puts over his political message through implicit meanings, seemingly vague and ambiguous, but which carry clear implications regarding the BNP's continued underlying anti-immigrant stance. These implicit messages were further conceptualized as a form of "doublespeak" – language that deliberately disguises, distorts, or reverses the meaning of words, and which may be characterized as a form of "calculated ambivalence."

**Keywords:** equivocation, right-wing discourse, implicit meanings, doublespeak, communicative conflict

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## **1 Introduction**

In 2009, Nick Griffin, the leader of the right-wing British National Party (BNP), was elected Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for the North-West of

England. As a result, he was invited to appear on the popular topical current affairs prime-time BBC television program *Question Time* (22 October 2009). This program typically features politicians from the three major UK political parties (Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat), as well as two other public figures who answer and debate questions put to them by the audience. One of these public figures may be a politician from a fourth British political party, in this case Nick Griffin. There is of course already an extensive literature on television debates, for example, between rival candidates for the American presidency (e.g., Schroeder 2008), between the three main UK party political leaders in the 2010 general election (e.g., Chadwick 2011), and between lay people and experts invited to discuss topical social and/or political issues (e.g., Livingstone and Lunt 1993). However, this was the first time a far right-wing British politician had appeared on the *Question Time* program, and thus provided a unique opportunity to analyze a sample of such political discourse in the context of a prime-time television debate.

The results of this analysis are compared with those from an already published study of two debates featuring Filip Dewinter and Gerolf Annemans, two Members of Parliament (MPs) from the Flemish Bloc (FB), a far right-wing party in Belgium (Simon-Vandenberg 2008). In both debates, the MPs' opponent was Etienne Vermeersch, a distinguished Flemish philosopher, who sought to demonstrate that the politicians had not abandoned their racist views. The debates took the form of a newspaper debate and a television program, respectively. The former took place in a newspaper office. In the published text of the debate, the two speakers alternate and reply to each other's previous turn; the journalist's comments were omitted.

An inductive analysis was conducted of the politicians' responses to those arguments by Simon-Vandenberg (2008), who identified three distinctive discursive features: personal attacks, denials of racism, and implicit meanings (specifically, to the effect that priority in all matters must be given to Flemish citizens over immigrants). Simon-Vandenberg conceptualized these discursive features in terms of the theory of equivocation, as proposed by Bavelas et al. (1990). In this paper, it was hypothesized on the basis of equivocation theory that comparable features might also be identified in Griffin's discourse.

This introduction is divided into four main sections: (i) background information on far right-wing political movements, with particular reference to the FB and BNP; (ii) a summary of Bavelas et al.'s (1990) theory of equivocation, and relevant research; (iii) analysis of FB discourse (Simon-Vandenberg 2008); (iv) rationale and main hypotheses for the analysis of Griffin's discourse.

## 1.1 Far right-wing political movements

At the outset, it should be noted that both the FB and the BNP can be regarded as part of a wider resurgence of far right-wing political movements in Europe (Mammone et al. 2012). Since the 1980s, millions of votes have been garnered by such parties, especially by the National Front in France, the Flemish Bloc/Flemish Interest (see below) in Belgium, the National Alliance in Italy, and the Freedom Party in Austria (Copsey 2008). Most recently, in the Greek general election of 2012, the far right-wing Golden Dawn won 21 seats on 7% of the popular vote. Although in electoral terms the BNP has by no means been as successful as its European counterparts, it has been much more successful in this respect than any other far-right party in the United Kingdom (Copsey 2008).

Parties such as these are termed the “populist radical right” by Mudde (2010), who has identified what he believes to be three key defining features: authoritarianism, populism, and what he calls “nativism.” By nativism, Mudde (2010: 1173) means an ideology according to which “. . . states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (‘the nation’), and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation state.” Authoritarianism he defines as the belief in a strictly ordered society in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely; populism as the view that politics should be the expression of the general will of the people, not that of the corrupt political elite. These key features of the populist radical right, Mudde argues, are best seen as a radicalization of mainstream societal values, which he refers to as a “pathological normalcy.”

In the United Kingdom, the far-right traces its origins to the British Union of Fascists, formed in 1932 by Sir Oswald Mosley (Mammone and Peace 2012). The BNP was formed in 1982 as a splinter group from another British far-right party (the National Front), but it was not until the 2001 general election that the BNP attracted wider recognition in the United Kingdom, following Griffin’s emergence as its leader in 1999 (Copsey 2008). In 2006, the local elections were a great success for the BNP, increasing its representation from 20 to 53 local counselors, based on a total of 229,000 votes. In 2008, the BNP gained its first seat in the London Assembly. In 2009, with nearly a million votes nationwide, two MEPs from the BNP were elected, one of whom was Nick Griffin (Mammone and Peace 2012).

Notably, the BNP since its inception has been strongly opposed to immigration. According to its 2010 general election manifesto, Islamic immigration must be “halted and reversed as it presents one of the most deadly threats yet to the survival of our nation” (Democracy, freedom, culture and identity: British National Party general elections manifesto 2010: 30). BNP policy is also to “deport

all foreigners convicted of crimes in Britain, regardless of their immigration status,” as well as to deport illegal immigrants and “reject all asylum seekers who passed safe countries on their way to Britain” (2010: 31).

The FB is a Flemish nationalist party, which calls for independence of Flanders, and is also strongly anti-immigrant. Some FB politicians had close links with neo-Nazi movements in the 1970s and 1980s. The party’s slogan (“Our own people first”) refers to the view that priority in all matters must be given to Flemish citizens over immigrants. In 2004, the Ghent court of appeal ruled the FB in contempt of the 1981 Belgian law on racism and xenophobia, a view upheld by the Belgian Supreme Court. Following these verdicts, FB dissolved itself and created a new party, Flemish Interest. In her analysis of the FB debates, Simon-Vandenberg (2008) conceptualized their discourse in terms of equivocation theory, as proposed by Bavelas et al. (1990). This theory and related research is summarized in the next section.

## 1.2 Equivocation theory

Equivocation, according to Bavelas et al. (1990: 28), is “... nonstraightforward communication ... ambiguous, contradictory, tangential, obscure or even evasive.” Equivocation is sometimes regarded as a form of logical fallacy, the misleading use of a term with more than one meaning or sense (e.g., Kahane and Cavender 2012). Equivocation may also be conceptualized in terms of classical rhetoric. Thus, Wodak et al. (2009: 215) refer to the “rhetorical principle of calculated ambivalence.”

The theory of equivocation, as proposed by Bavelas et al. (1990), was developed in the context of experimental social psychology. It has two main propositions. Firstly, according to the situational theory of communicative conflict (STCC), people typically equivocate when posed a question to which all of the possible replies have potentially negative consequences, but where nevertheless a reply is still expected. Secondly, equivocation is conceptualized as multidimensional, with four main dimensions: *sender*, *content*, *receiver*, and *context*. Bavelas et al. (1990: 34) state that “All messages that would (intuitively or otherwise) be called equivocal are ambiguous in at least one of these four elements.” The sender dimension refers to the extent to which the response is the speaker’s own opinion; a statement is considered more equivocal if the speaker fails to acknowledge it as his own opinion, or attributes it to another person. Content refers to comprehensibility, an unclear statement being considered more equivocal. Receiver refers to the extent to which the message is addressed to the other person in the situation – the less so the more equivocal the message. Context refers to the

extent to which the response is a direct answer to the question – the less the relevance, the more equivocal the message.

Bavelas et al.'s (1990) original formulation of equivocation theory has been re-conceptualized in terms of what are called *threats to face*. Specifically, Bull et al. (1996) proposed that when all the possible forms of response to a question are potentially face threatening, it sets up a communicative conflict; furthermore, that in the context of broadcast political interviews, threats to face are the prime cause of such conflicts. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) theory of politeness, a threat to face is regarded as a response which may either make the politician look bad (*positive face*) and/or may threaten their future freedom of action (*negative face*). Conflictual questions create pressures toward equivocation as the least face-threatening response, but this is still regarded as face damaging, because such responses may make the politician look evasive (Bull 2008).

Equivocation theory has been supported by a substantial body of empirical research. Thus, Bavelas et al. (1990) conducted a series of experiments in which several communicative conflicts were described. Participants were then asked to indicate how they would respond to these scenarios. Their responses were rated by observers along the four dimensions of sender, content, receiver, and context. In comparison to non-conflictual scenarios, Bavelas et al. consistently found that conflictual situations received significantly more equivocal responses. A field experiment was conducted by Bavelas et al. (1988) on political equivocation at the July 1984 Canadian Liberal Party leadership convention. It was found that equivocal responses from supporters of the less favored second-choice leadership candidate (Jean Chretien) could be effectively predicted from the STCC. Another study of political equivocation was conducted by Bull et al. (1996), who found in an analysis of 18 broadcast British political interviews that the politicians were most likely to equivocate in response to conflictual questions, and to answer in response to non-conflictual questions. Again, Feldman (2004) analyzed 67 one-on-one televised interviews with Japanese politicians. Overall, Feldman's research showed that equivocation could be identified on all four of the Bavelas et al. dimensions. Thus, although the original scales were developed on the basis of laboratory experiments in North America, they proved readily applicable to the widely different social and cultural context of televised political interviews in Japan.

In their theory of equivocation, Bavelas et al. (1990) make no particular distinction between replying to a question indirectly through implicit language (what they call hinting at an answer) and not replying to it at all. Thus, research on implicit language is also relevant to equivocation theory. For example, Del Vento et al. (2009) showed how medical doctors use implicit language when confronted with the communicative dilemma of delivering a terminal diagnosis. This

dilemma is created by the need to be truthful without seeming callous. Del Vento et al. showed how doctors were able to soften the blow of the terminal diagnosis, through, for example, the use of euphemisms and pronouns, and the avoidance of explicit terms, but still in a way which was fully comprehended by the patients.

In another study, the use of implicit language was analyzed in the celebrated interview between Diana, Princess of Wales and Martin Bashir, broadcast shortly before her divorce from Prince Charles, her husband and heir to the British throne (Bull 1997). In this instance, the communicative conflict was that if Diana had been too outspokenly critical of her husband and the Royal Family, she might have alienated public opinion, and exacerbated an already difficult domestic situation, or even faced some kind of retaliation. Conversely, if she avoided any comment on her husband or the Royal Family, or even denied there were any problems between them, she would not be able to give her side of the story, and would look foolish for having agreed to give the interview in the first place. Her use of implicit criticisms was conceptualized as one solution to this communicative conflict.

### 1.3 Analysis of FB discourse (Simon-Vandenberg 2008)

In her study of Flemish MPs, Simon-Vandenberg (2008) proposed that their implicit language could be seen to reflect a communicative conflict. On the one hand, given the legal position, the politicians might be expected to deny any statement that could be construed as racist. The MPs have been obliged by law to delete certain passages from their political program, so when confronted with passages which might seem racist, they avoid expressing commitment to those utterances, either refusing to endorse them, or distancing themselves in some way. But on the other hand, the MPs will arguably also wish to reassure their hard-core supporters that the party's ideology is the same.

In this context, the implicit language of FB politicians enabled them to put over their message, but with sufficient ambiguity to avoid risks of prosecution or wider condemnation for racist discourse. So, for example, in the newspaper debate, the philosopher asked "Has the principle 'Our own people first' been abolished then?" The MP replied, "There is nothing dirty or racist about it. It simply means that I defend what is most precious to me. It is no disgrace to love your own children more". Although the MP does not answer the question, the clear implication of this response is that the principle "Our own people first" has not been abolished. The philosopher then rephrased the question in a slightly different way. "Does 'Our own people first' mean priority for Flemish people regarding housing or employment?" The MP responded, "I'm not allowed to be in

favour of that. It is forbidden by law, since the change of the anti-racism law. You are not going to extract statements about that from me, because otherwise I risk condemnation. But in general terms I can tell you that in my opinion nationality gives certain rights and duties and hence also certain privileges". Thus, although the MP refused to answer this question, there is again the clear implication that the Flemish people should have priority in housing and employment ("... in my opinion nationality gives certain rights and duties and hence also certain privileges").

The implicit language of these MPs can be conceptualized in terms of the content dimension of equivocation theory (Bavelas et al. 1990). More specifically, it might be regarded as a form of "doublespeak" – language that deliberately disguises, distorts, or reverses the meaning of words (e.g., Lutz 1987). Thus, although the content of the FB politicians' discourse may seem unclear, vague, and ambiguous, nevertheless it carries the clear implication that the underlying "Our own people first" message is still the same. It should be noted that this linking of the concept of doublespeak to the content dimension of equivocation theory is novel. In the theory's original version, content is defined simply in terms of comprehensibility, an unclear statement being considered more equivocal.

In addition to implicit responses, Simon-Vandenberg (2008) identified two other distinctive features of FB discourse – denials of racism and personal attacks. Denials can readily be construed in terms of one pole of the underlying communicative conflict; they avoid the legal risk of prosecution. Less obvious is the role of personal attacks. However, personal attacks may also be understood as a form of denial, specifically, what Fetzer (2007) terms the denial of sincerity. For example, one of the MPs attacks the philosopher by saying "I do not come from a black collaboration family, while your father was a VNV member". In asserting that the philosopher's father was a member of the VNV (a Flemish nationalist political party which collaborated with the Nazis in the war), the FB politician can be seen to attack the philosopher's credibility, thereby denying his criticisms of the FB by implying they are hypocritical. Customarily, such *ad hominem* attacks are regarded as a form of logical fallacy, because they are intended to undermine an argument by attacking the speaker instead of addressing the speaker's argument.

The three distinctive features identified by Simon-Vandenberg (2008) in FB discourse can be further conceptualized in terms of threats to face (Bull et al. 1996; Bull 2008). Thus, on the one hand, it is seriously face damaging for a politician to be seen as racist, given that racism is totally unacceptable amongst a substantial proportion of the population. What is worse, it is forbidden by law to make racist remarks in public. On the other hand, were the FB politicians to be seen as having departed from the cause of "Our own people first," this would be



highly face damaging in the eyes of their own hardline supporters. With face threats in either direction, the implicit responses utilized by the two FB politicians can be understood as a way of minimizing face threats in the situation in which they find themselves. It also enables them to address the concerns of multiple groups of voters.

## 1.4 Rationale for the analysis of Griffin's discourse in the *Question Time* program

In the United Kingdom, the BNP is arguably caught in a comparable communicative conflict. In contemporary British society, to be seen as racist is widely regarded as reprehensible. Since 1965, there has been statutory legislation against racial discrimination in the United Kingdom, revised and extended through a series of parliamentary statutes. The BNP is condemned by many sections of the media, including right-wing newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*. Leading politicians from all the mainstream political parties have repeatedly called for their own supporters to vote for anyone but the BNP (e.g., Gordon Brown, Labour Prime Minister, 2007–2010; David Cameron, Conservative Prime Minister since 2010; Nick Clegg, Liberal Democrat Deputy Prime Minister since 2010). The BNP is widely perceived as a racist party, and to support the BNP, let alone vote for them, is totally unacceptable in significant areas of society. At the same time, much of the BNP's political support comes from its anti-immigrant stance; to be seen to abandon this would be highly face damaging in the eyes of its hardline supporters.

In this paper, it is proposed that both the FB and the BNP find themselves in a comparable social and political situation, characterized by communicative conflict. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that the distinctive features of right-wing discourse already identified by Simon-Vandenberg (2008) in her study of FB politicians will be replicated in this analysis of Griffin's performance on *Question Time*. In particular, it is hypothesized that Griffin will utilize various forms of doublespeak to put over the underlying racial message of the BNP.

## 2 Method

### 2.1 Participants

The five members of the *Question Time* panel were Jack Straw MP (Labour Justice Minister), Baroness Sayeed Awaris (Conservative Shadow Minister for Commu-

nity Cohesion), Chris Huhne MP (Liberal Democrat Home Affairs Spokesman), Nick Griffin MEP (Leader of the British National Party), and Bonnie Greer OBE (playwright and critic). In addition, there was the chairman, David Dimbleby. There was also a studio audience. The *Question Time* program was broadcast on 22 October 2009.

## 2.2 Apparatus

A VHS video recorder with slow motion facilities to record the *Question Time* program, and a transcript.

## 2.3 Procedure

The *Question Time* program was recorded off-air, and transcribed verbatim, using standard UK English orthography.

Both authors analyzed the transcript independently to investigate whether the distinctive features identified by Simon-Vandenberg (2008) in her study of FB politicians were also observable in Griffin's discourse, and also to investigate any other distinctive discursive features. The final analysis was prepared on the basis of joint discussion and mutual agreement.

# 3 Results

The three distinctive features identified by Simon-Vandenberg (2008) in her analysis of the debates with the two FB politicians (denials, personal attacks, and implicit meanings) were readily identifiable in Griffin's discourse.

## 3.1 Denials

Denials can be illustrated as follows. One form is for Griffin to challenge the truth of a proposition. For example, in the following extended sequence, Griffin denies accusations that he is a Nazi ("I am not a Nazi I never have been"). The extract is quoted at length, since various aspects of it are referred to later in the text.

Dimbleby: Nick Griffin, you said if Churchill were alive today, his own place would be in the British National Party, why do you say that and why did you hijack his reputation?

Griffin: Erm, I say that Churchill belonged in the British National Party because no other party will have him for what he said in the early days of mass immigration into the country, for the fact that “they’re only coming for our benefits system” and for the fact that, er, in his younger days, he was extremely, er, critical of the dangers of fundamentalist Islam, er, in a way which would now be described as Islamophobic. Er, I believe that the whole of the, er, effort in the second world war, and the first, was designed to preserve British sovereignty, British freedom, which Jack Straw’s government is now giving away lock, stock and barrel to the European Union, and to prevent this country being invaded by foreigners. Finally, my father was in the RAF during the Second World War, while Mr Straw’s father was in prison for refusing to fight Adolf, Adolf Hitler.

[Applause and boos]

Dimbleby: What, what, sorry, wait a minute, what, what’s that got to do with this? What’s that got to do with this?

Griffin: Mr Straw was attacking me and I’ve been relentlessly attacked and demonised over the last few days, and the fact is that my father was in the RAF during the Second World War, I am not a Nazi, I never have been. (1)

In a further exchange presented below, Griffin claims that “the entire political elite (. . .) has imposed an enormous multicultural programme, experiment, on the British people, without so much as by your leave” (2). When challenged by Greer as to who the British people are, Griffin then talks about the “indigenous British”. When he is then challenged by Jack Straw that by “indigenous” he means whites, he denies it: “Skin colour’s irrelevant, Jack, skin colour’s irrelevant” (3). Clearly, the audience do not believe him, because they jeer at this remark.

Griffin: Jack Straw was actually right, I think, on this, when he said that, no, it’s not the Labour Party’s fault, it’s the fault of the entire political elite, which has imposed an enormous multicultural programme, experiment, on the British people, without so much as by your leave. (2) All we’ve got out of it is tax bills. It’s transformed our country, to the extent that the government’s own figures, er, interpreted by . . .

Greer: Who are the British people? Who are you talking about?

Griffin: Let me finish and then come, we’ll come back to that.

Greer: Yeah, yeah, I'd like to know.

Griffin: It's . . . Yeah. The government's own figures, according to demographers at Oxford University, show that the indigenous British, the people who've been here . . .

Straw: The, the whites. The whites.

Griffin: That's irr, skin colour's irrelevant, Jack, skin colour's irrelevant.

[Jeering]

Straw: They're all white, Mr Griffin, indigenous means white. (3)

Another form of denial is for Griffin to claim that he has been misquoted. For example, when a man in the audience states: "The vast majority of this audience, the vast majority of this audience, find what you stand for to be completely disgusting", Griffin replies: "Without a shadow of a doubt, I appreciate that if you look at some of the things I'm quoted as having said, in the Daily Mail and so on, I'd be a monster, those things are outrageous lies" (4). A second example comes in response to Dimbleby, who states: "You say you're misquoted. All I'm saying is, I can't find the misquotations, and apparently, nor can you". Griffin replies: "A misquotation in the Mail today, it says that, er, I said that black people walk like monkeys and so on, that is an outrageous lie. Erm I appreciate you being extraordinarily angry about a statement like that, I never said such a thing. I never said such a thing" (5). A third example can be seen in the following interchange between Huhne, Dimbleby, and Griffin:

Huhne: And this is the man who actually said, when we're thinking of Churchill and fighting fascism, yes, Adolf went a bit too far. Now which bit too far, Nick Griffin, did Adolf Hitler go? Was it in gassing the Jews? Was it in bombing British cities?

Griffin: That's, yes, that's another one of those lines

Dimbleby: Sorry, which line?

Griffin: I'm talking about the one, Adolf went a bit too far, I never said such a thing. (6)

Interestingly, this tactic of denial is commented on explicitly by other members of the *Question Time* panel. Dimbleby directly challenges Griffin's claim that he has been misquoted. "Let's just, let's just go to deny, deny, denying the Holocaust, for instance, did you, did you deny the Holocaust? Yes you did", to which Griffin responded "I did not have conviction for Holocaust denial" (7). Again: "Ethnicity, ethnicity. Please, ethnicity, I want to see Britain become 99% genetically white, just as she was 11 years before I was born. On race, right? Mixed marriages, it's, er, sad when a unique human genotype becomes extinct". Griffin just

responds with “What?” (8). Dimpleby then continues by saying “Islam, we’ll come to it later. You say you’re misquoted. All I’m saying is, I can’t find the misquotations, and apparently, nor can you” (9). In reply to this, Griffin replies not by challenging the misquotations to which Dimpleby refers, but by citing a different misquotation (5).

Huhne also substantiates Dimpleby’s criticisms by reference to a video recording of Griffin: “And I would like his view, see whether he has been misquoted on this, because this was video footage, there’s no question of him being misquoted, this is his technique” (10). The video footage to which Huhne refers is a YouTube video (BNP Nick Griffin + KKK Terrorist), recorded at a private meeting of American white nationalists, but subsequently uploaded onto the Internet by Ukfightback (an anti-fascist organization). In this video, Griffin appeared alongside David Duke, a former leader of the Klu Klux Klan (a far right-wing American organization with a violent history of lynching and murdering blacks). Later in the debate, Dimpleby takes up Huhne’s criticism, quoting Griffin as saying on the video “But if you put that, i.e. getting rid of all coloured people from Britain, as your sole aim to start with, you’re going to get absolutely nowhere, so instead of talking about racial purity, we talk about identity, we use saleable words, freedom, security, identity, democracy. Nobody can come and attack you on those ideas” (11). Subsequently, Huhne further substantiates criticisms of Griffin’s denials by quoting from the BNP Language and Concepts Discipline Manual “. . . which starts off, rule one, the BNP is not a racist or racial party. Well, no other party has to say they’re not a racist or, or racial party” (12). (This manual was uploaded onto the Internet by WikiLeaks, an organization which publishes private, classified, and secret media documents.)

In (7), (8), and (9), Dimpleby directly challenges Griffin’s claims that he has been misquoted by citing several specific examples of previous remarks by Griffin, all of which may be construed as racist. In (10), Huhne may be understood as seeking to undermine Griffin’s stance by explicitly referring to his claims of being misquoted as a “technique”. He also supports it by reference to the recording of Griffin on YouTube. In (11), Dimpleby elaborates on the YouTube video, and quotes directly from it. In (12), Huhne further supports his criticisms by quoting from the BNP Language and Concepts Discipline Manual, which denies that the BNP is a racist or racial party.

### 3.2 Personal attacks

The following personal attack is made by Griffin on the Labour Justice Minister Jack Straw: “. . . my father was in the RAF during the Second World War, while Mr

Straw's father was in prison for refusing to fight Adolf, Adolf Hitler" (13). This was in response to a question from Dimbleby about the celebrated British prime minister, Winston Churchill (1). In this passage, Griffin might be understood as seeking to reverse roles with the Justice Minister, by putting Straw in the camp of Nazi supporters and himself in the camp of loyal British citizens.

Interestingly, Dimbleby comments directly on Griffin's personal attack ("What, what, sorry, wait a minute, what, what's that got to do with this? What's that got to do with this?" [1]). By pointing out the irrelevance of the remark, Dimbleby might be understood as picking up on the logical fallacy of *ad hominem* remarks referred to above – that they attack the speaker instead of addressing the speaker's argument. It is worth noting that one of the FB politicians used a very similar *ad hominem* attack on the philosopher, when he says "I do not come from a black collaboration family, while your father was a VNV member" (Simon-Vandenberg 2008).

### 3.3 Implicit meanings

The BNP is widely regarded as a racist, pro-white, anti-immigrant party. At no point during *Question Time* does Griffin explicitly endorse this stance, but many of his remarks can be understood as implicitly supporting this point of view. Thus, Griffin uses the term "indigenous British", which is understood by both Straw and the audience as meaning the white British, although Griffin explicitly denies this (3). Griffin even likens the effects of immigration to genocide. Dimbleby quotes from the BNP website which describes immigration policy as "the greatest act of genocide against the British people in history". When he asks Griffin "So successive governments are committing genocide against their own people, is that your theory?", Griffin replies "I'm afraid that's the case" (14). The term genocide was coined from the Latin noun *genus* (race) and the suffix *-cidium*, which refers to the act of killing (e.g., homicide, suicide, patricide). Hence, the term literally refers to organized mass murder, the deliberate and systematic destruction, in whole or in part, of a racial, religious, or national group. As such, it is arguably the very worst accusation that can be made against a political opponent.

Whether its use in this context is intended to be literal or metaphorical is not clear, nor does Griffin seek to unpack its meaning. But neither does he seek to deny the use of the term, which in this context can only be understood as highly emotive, even provocative. If Griffin and the BNP regard immigration policy as an act of genocide, then presumably they regard immigration and immigrants as exceedingly threatening to what Griffin refers to as the "indigenous British".

Accordingly, the use of the term genocide can be understood to convey an implicit attitude of intense hostility on the part of both Griffin and the BNP to immigration and to immigrants.

Other forms of implicit meaning identified in this analysis are referred to as *claims to victimization*, *parallels*, *disconnection*, and *association*. Each is discussed below, together with illustrative examples, and a rationale for why each is regarded as a form of implicit meaning.

### 3.3.1 Claims to victimization

Victimization can be understood as the unwarranted singling out of an individual or group for cruel or unjust treatment (*Oxford Dictionary*). For example, in justifying his personal attack on Straw, Griffin states that he has been "... relentlessly attacked and demonized" (1). The word "demonized" represents the speaker as the underdog who is the victim of a campaign aimed at persecuting him.

Claims to victimization are quite common amongst far right-wing politicians. Thus, one of the Flemish MPs represents the FB as a victim of the establishment: "... I don't think that in democracies there has ever been a party which got a knife to its throat in the way we did and then saw that the knife was stuck in" (Simon-Vandenberg 2008). Similarly, Jean-Marie Le Pen (the French far right-wing politician who ran for the French presidency five times) also presents himself as a victim of the establishment (Bonnafoous 1998).

Claims to victimization can be seen as a form of implicit meaning, because such claims imply that far right-wing politicians are unfairly treated, misrepresented, and wrongly quoted by others.

### 3.3.2 Parallels

Parallels can be seen as a form of comparison, a strategy in classical rhetoric that examines similarities and/or differences between two people, places, ideas, or things. In the following extracts, Griffin draws a parallel with the situation of indigenous cultures in New Zealand and North America:

Griffin: No one here, Jack Straw, would dare to go to New Zealand and say to a Maori, what do you mean, indigenous? You wouldn't dare to go to, er, North America, and say to an American Red Indian, what do you mean indigenous? We're all the same. The indigenous people of these islands, the people, the English, the Scots, the Irish and the Welsh. (15)

Straw: The whites.

Griffin: The colour is irrelevant. It's the people who have been here overwhelmingly, for the last 17 thousand years. We are the aborigines here. (16)

Parallels can be seen as a form of implicit meaning, implying that the position of the indigenous population in the United Kingdom is comparable to that of the Maoris in New Zealand, the North American Red Indians, or the aborigines in Australia. Given that both groups are commonly regarded as oppressed racial minorities, this parallel can also be understood as an implicit claim to victimization (see 3.3.1 above). In this case, it is not the party, however, which is represented as a victim, but the people it claims to represent, i.e., “the British people”. Arguably, this parallel is quite misleading. It is seriously open to dispute whether the position of the indigenous population of the United Kingdom is in any way comparable to that of ethnic groups in either New Zealand, the United States, or Australia, groups who were colonized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Parallels are also characteristic of FB discourse. On the one hand, they are used to justify the FB ideology as one that would be acceptable in any other context and hence to imply the irrationality of the mainstream rejection of the FB program; on the other hand, they are used to discredit mainstream opponents by drawing parallels with objectionable contexts. For example, in the Flemish newspaper debate analyzed by Simon-Vandenberghe (2008), the FB slogan “Our own people first” (which may be understood as giving priority in all matters to Flemish citizens over immigrants) is “interpreted” by the FB politician as “It is not shameful to love one's own children most”. Thus, a misleading parallel is drawn by equating blood relationships with those between compatriots, which are not in any way synonymous.

Parallels are also used to characterize opponents in negative ways. For example, in the same newspaper debate the politician says: “You dehumanize the leaders of the Flemish Bloc and our voters. That's what the Hutus did with the Tutsis before persecuting them.” This is the most far-fetched parallel of all, likening the way FB leaders and their supporters are treated with the Rwandan genocide (the wholesale slaughter of the Tutsis by the Hutus), and also can be understood as a claim to victimization (see 3.3.1 above).

### 3.3.3 Disconnection

The term disconnection is used metaphorically to refer to the rift that Griffin claims exists between the people and the political elite, which has already been illustrated above (2), (14). In (2), Griffin claims that the political elite have imposed



an unwarranted multicultural experiment on the British people. In (14), he confirms the view as formulated by Dimbleby that successive governments have been committing genocide against their own people. In response to a question about immigration, he claims that “our immigration policy is, I think, supported by 84% of the British people at present who, according to a very recent opinion poll, er, said they worried about immigration” (17). Of course, there is no logical connection between these two statements. Simply because 84% of respondents in a recent opinion poll said they “worried about immigrants” does not automatically mean that they support BNP immigration policy.

The same strategy is used by the FB politicians (Simon-Vandenberg 2008). For example, in the newspaper debate the FB speaker accused the philosopher of raking up quotes which are outdated, instead of dealing with the present situation: “The Flemish people are not interested in your folder with cuttings, they see that we are concerned with today’s problems”. This denial is strengthened by representing the FB’s position as that of “the Flemish people”.

Disconnection can be seen as a form of implicit meaning, because it implies that it is the BNP and the FB who represent the people, not the political elite or the media. The concept is similar to that of dissociation (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969), in which a unitary concept is dichotomized for the purposes of argumentation.

### 3.3.4 Association

The converse of dissociation as an argumentation technique is association, where two distinct elements are connected by the speaker (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969). In (1), Griffin associates the views of the BNP with those held by Winston Churchill. Arguably, Griffin uses association with such a distinguished political leader as a means of shedding the taint of extremism, and thereby implicitly demonstrating the unreasonable nature of objections to BNP policies and outlook. By interpreting Britain’s involvement in the Second World War and Churchill’s role in it as having had the sole purpose of defending British sovereignty against “foreigners” who are now allowed to “invade the country”, Griffin reverses the roles of “mainstream” and “marginal” views: what is now considered extremist is in fact sensible and the traditional British ideology. The BNP is thus portrayed as standing up for British values. Of course, Griffin’s appeal to the authority of Churchill is highly questionable, given that Churchill lived in a very different period of British history, nor is he alive now to dispute Griffin’s claims.

Association with others who have a positive image is also found in FB discourse. For example, in the newspaper debate analyzed by Simon-Vandenberg

(2008), the philosopher at some point probes into the consequences of the principle “Our own people first” and says “According to you non-European foreigners are not even allowed to buy a house here”, to which the politician replies “In Scandinavia that is indeed the case”. The comparison with a Scandinavian country (which one is left unspecified by the politician) can also be understood as a parallel (see 3.3.2 above), and carries the implicit message that the FB’s program is not objectionable in other western European countries which are generally thought of as progressive and having a humane social system.

## 4 Discussion

In this paper, a number of distinctive features of Griffin’s discourse have been identified: denials of racism, personal attacks, and implicit meanings. Implicit meanings are used both to put over its racial stance, and to imply that the BNP’s position is entirely reasonable, respectable, and understandable. In this respect, his discourse shows striking similarities with that of the far right-wing FB politicians. In the introduction, it was proposed that these similarities reflect the comparable social and political situation in which both the FB and the BNP find themselves, which was conceptualized in terms of the situational theory of communicative conflict (Bavelas et al. 1990). In the context of this theory, each of the identified features of Griffin’s discourse will be discussed in turn.

Denials can readily be understood as an avoidance of one aspect of the BNP’s communicative conflict. To be seen as racist is unacceptable in many areas of British society. Interestingly, the BNP shows explicit awareness of this issue in Rule 1 of the BNP Language and Concepts Discipline Manual, which states: “The BNP is not a ‘racist’ or ‘racial’ party. It should never be referred to as such by BNP activists, and anyone else who does so must be politely but firmly corrected. The precisely correct description of what we are, in the standard terminology of international comparative politics, is a ‘patriotic’ or ‘ethno-nationalist’ party”. These terms might be seen as euphemisms, or coded words, conveying a clear meaning to a receptive audience, while remaining inconspicuous to the uninitiated.

Notably, Griffin’s opponents and critics repeatedly challenge his denials, in particular his claims to be misquoted (7)–(10); indeed, Huhne explicitly refers to it as a “technique” (10). Huhne further supports his characterization of Griffin’s denials as strategic, by his reference to the BNP Language and Concepts Manual (12) and to the YouTube video (10). In (11), Dimpleby elaborates on the YouTube video with direct quotations from Griffin’s speech on the video: “[. . .] so instead of talking about racial purity, we talk about identity, we use saleable words, freedom, security, identity, democracy”. In this quotation, Griffin explicitly

acknowledges that he is using two forms of discourse, one which is racial, the other which is “saleable”, in the form of what might be understood as coded words. In these various ways, Griffin’s critics may be seen to depict his denials as strategic and insincere, thereby undermining his credibility. Furthermore, the passage confirms the characterization of Griffin’s discourse as a form of double-speak, language that deliberately disguises, distorts, or reverses the meaning of words (e.g., Lutz 1987).

A second reason for Griffin’s denials is the risk of litigation. Griffin makes explicit reference to this, when he claims in response to a question about the Jewish Holocaust that he has changed his mind on this issue, but cannot give an explanation as to why because of European law. (Holocaust denial, it should be noted, is explicitly or implicitly illegal in sixteen European countries. Furthermore, the European Union’s Framework decision on Racism and Xenophobia [28 November 2008] states that denying or grossly trivializing “crimes of genocide” should be made “punishable in all EU Member States”.) Similarly, Simon-Vandenberg (2008) reports how FB speakers also claim that court rulings curtail their freedom of speech.

In the introduction, it was argued that personal attacks can be conceptualized as a form of denial, specifically a denial of sincerity (Fetzer 2007). Thus, in Griffin’s case, not only does he present himself as patriotic (his father fought for Britain in the Second World War as a member of the Royal Air Force), he implies that Straw’s father as a conscientious objector was unpatriotic (“Mr Straw’s father was in prison for refusing to fight Adolf, Adolf Hitler”, see [1]). Thereby Griffin arguably seeks to undermine Straw’s credibility, and implicatively invalidate his criticisms of the BNP. This type of tactic may therefore well be conceptualized as a feature of what Holmes (1993) refers to as “illicit discourse,” the type of discourse labeled right wing, extremist, and racist by mainstream European parties. Although personal attacks are not unique to far right-wing politicians, it should be noted that they are comparatively rare amongst mainstream British politicians. Thus, in an analysis of 33 broadcast interviews with four British party political leaders, it was found that the only politician to use personal attacks was former prime minister Margaret Thatcher (Bull 1994). Furthermore, these attacks pertained only to the putative neutrality of the journalist, not to his private life or personality (Simon-Vandenberg 2008).

Implicit meanings can be readily understood in terms of Bavelas et al.’s (1990) theory of equivocation. Notably, Griffin’s implicit discourse (like that of the FB politicians) can be regarded as a form of doublespeak. Seemingly, it is vague and ambiguous. Terms such as the “British people,” the “indigenous people” are never clearly defined. However, it can readily be understood as carrying a clear implicit message to reassure the party’s supporters that the underlying anti-

immigrant message is still the same. Thus, although never explicitly stated, the terms “British people” and “indigenous people” can readily be taken as meaning the white population, while at the same time this interpretation, if challenged, has the strategic advantage of deniability. Interestingly, audience members seem to be aware of this duality. For example, one audience member remarks, “... I think the, erm, the public who are voting for the BNP do need to be educated about what Nick stands for. He’s basically a wolf in sheep’s clothing”.

The other distinctive features identified in Griffin’s discourse (claims of victimization, parallels, disconnection, and association) can all arguably be understood as forms of implicit meaning. Victimization implies that it is Griffin and the BNP who are unfairly treated and misrepresented by others; disconnection implies that it is the BNP who represent the people, not the political elite or the media. Parallels imply that the BNP’s position is entirely justifiable when compared with indigenous populations in other countries. In all these ways, Griffin can imply that the BNP’s position is entirely reasonable, respectable, and understandable, without explicitly saying so. Furthermore, through association with distinguished political leaders, Griffin implies that it is the BNP which is standing up for traditional British values, not the other mainstream political parties.

In short, it is proposed that all the distinctive features identified in Griffin’s discourse can be subsumed within two underlying communicative goals – unmitigated rejection of the opponent’s claims, combined with mitigated and ambivalent discourse appealing to various groups of potential voters. These twin goals, resulting from opposing pressures of a legal, social, and electoral nature, are conceptualized in terms of an underlying communicative conflict. On the one hand, for both social and legal reasons, Griffin denies criticisms that characterize the BNP as anti-immigrant or racist. On the other hand, he seeks to reassure his supporters of the BNP’s continued underlying anti-immigrant stance through implicit messages to this effect, while using other strategies to imply that this position is reasonable, respectable, and understandable.

The concept of doublespeak has not previously been linked to the STCC, but it is conceptualized here as a form of equivocation on Bavelas et al.’s (1990) content dimension. Whereas according to Bavelas et al. (1990: 34) this dimension refers to comprehensibility (an unclear statement being considered more equivocal), doublespeak does much more than this. Although what Griffin states may seem vague or ambiguous, it also carries clear implicit messages, which furthermore have the advantage of deniability. Thus, if challenged, the speaker can deny the implication, if for whatever reason it is too risky to make the message explicit. From this perspective, doublespeak can be seen as highly strategic – as in effect, calculated ambivalence.

In this paper, the discourse of far right-wing politicians has been analyzed as an example of the strategic use of implicit language, conceptualized in terms of Bavelas et al.'s (1990) theory of equivocation. Thus, on the one hand, for social and legal reasons, Griffin denies criticisms that characterize the BNP as anti-immigrant or racist. On the other hand, he endeavors to put over the BNP's political message through a form of doublespeak. Although these messages may seem vague and ambiguous, they carry clear implications of the BNP's continued underlying anti-immigrant stance. This linking of doublespeak to equivocation theory is novel. As such, it is proposed both as a theoretical elaboration of the content dimension of equivocation theory, and as a contribution to the growing research literature on the strategic use of implicit messages in various social situations characterized by communicative conflict.

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